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# Wool and Its Upkeep

By LILLIAN LUND<sup>1</sup>

Wool has long been prized for its many excellent qualities, especially by people who live where cold weather necessitates the wearing of warm clothing. Not only do wool fabrics afford warmth, but they are durable, and attractive in appearance as well. However, no matter how attractive a fabric may be, a certain amount of upkeep is essential if the garment is to maintain its original good appearance. This can best be accomplished if the fiber characteristics are known and understood and this knowledge applied along with the common practices of pressing, storing, and general care, usually given to wearing apparel.

## Characteristics of the Wool Fiber

Many of the qualities and characteristics of wool are apparent and are generally recognized and understood by the consumer of wool fabrics. However, there are a few properties which are not visible, yet they play an important part in the behavior of wool materials. A few of these characteristics are described briefly here.

**Resilience**, which is the ability of the fiber to spring back after compression, is one of the unique properties of wool, and gives it advantages which most other fibers do not possess. It is especially important in reducing the amount of pressing necessary, since the fibers will tend to return to their original form after being wrinkled or creased. If the garment is hung in a rather damp atmosphere, the wrinkles will disappear more rapidly. Moisture helps to release the fibers from new strain or tension, and the fabric returns to its former shape.

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**Elasticity** is the ability of the material to stretch and return to its original form, like a rubber band. The wool fiber does not respond as rapidly to stretching as rubber, but if it is slowly elongated a definite extension will result. When this tension is released the fiber immediately makes a partial recovery, but may not return quite to its original form. A temporary "set" is thus given, which the fiber slowly loses if allowed sufficient time. This quality constitutes one of the reasons that good wool fabrics do not usually become permanently wrinkled or shapeless.

**Plasticity** is another inherent quality of wool which is not always recognized and utilized, yet is important in the skillful handling of wool materials. If the wool fiber is subjected to a boiling temperature (steam), and has absorbed as much moisture as it can hold, the fiber becomes quite pliable and can be molded or shaped. The form to which it is shaped under these conditions will be retained to some extent after it is cooled. A more or less permanent "set" can be produced by applying pressure when the fibers are in a plastic state. This permanency of the set will depend upon the amount of pressure and moisture which has been applied.

If heat is applied after the steam has disappeared, the wool fiber loses its moisture content and the fibers become harsh, rough, and brittle, losing much of their tensile strength. For this reason pressing must always be discontinued while the fabric is still steaming.

When it is desired to remove a "set" such as a fold, pleat, or other pressed-in lines, this may be done more or less completely by again exposing the fibers to the same humidity and temperature conditions as before, but without pressure. This is accomplished by holding the iron just above the press cloth, but not allowing any weight to rest upon the fabric. Enough steam will thus be developed to remove the creases, provided too high a temperature has not been used originally and pressing was not continued until the fabric was dry.

### **Equipment for Pressing**

In order to do an efficient job of pressing, it is essential that the proper equipment be available. Many items are ordinary household commodities. Some can be purchased and others are easily made or improvised in the home.

A list of essential equipment for pressing includes the following items:

1. A smooth, well-padded board makes pressing easier. Be sure the padding is firm and not too soft.
2. A heavy napped woolen pressing cloth. The use of wool against wool helps to prevent shine.

3. Cotton cloths—cheesecloth or muslin. Heavy duck, drilling, or even canvas can be used, to which moisture is applied and only the steam will penetrate. Cheesecloth or thin wrapping paper can be used to cover the damp cloth to prevent the iron from sticking.
4. A sponge for applying moisture is helpful if a heavy press cloth is used and the moisture applied to it instead of a thinner cloth wrung from a pan of water.
5. A padded roll makes the pressing of seams and sleeves much easier. This can easily be made by wrapping a folded magazine with a heavy towel. A sleeve form, which is made of muslin cut by a plain sleeve pattern and stuffed firmly, is an excellent aid in sleeve pressing.
6. A tailor's cushion is useful for pressing armholes, sleeve caps, rolled collars, shaped waist fronts, etc. Such cushions can be purchased at notion counters, or made from muslin and stuffed with cotton, wool, or sawdust. If made in the form of a mitt, they will be more versatile than the plain pads.
7. An ordinary iron or a steam iron may be used.

### Pressing

Wool may be pressed on the right side, since the iron does not come into contact with the fabric. Garments such as trousers, coats, and jackets cannot be pressed in any other way.

When using a steam iron, no pressing cloth is needed if the garment can be pressed on the wrong side, but a cloth should be used when pressing on the right side in order to prevent shine.

Begin at the top of the garment and work down, first pressing sleeves and other parts that fall off the board.

A strip of heavy paper or cardboard can be placed under seams, pocket flaps, hems, or between folds of pleats to prevent edge marks from showing on the right side of the garment. In pressing hems, place piece of garment material at top of hem to equalize the thickness. This will prevent a line showing after pressing.

### Method of Procedure

1. Place garment over the ironing board right or wrong side up.
2. Place woolen pressing cloth over the areas to be pressed.
3. Cover this with a damp cloth to provide the necessary moisture or steam.
4. Place a dry cloth of light weight cotton over the damp cloth to prevent the iron from sticking.
5. Have the iron hot, but not hot enough to scorch the cotton cloth (400-500° F.)
6. Press—*do not iron*. Press lightly at first until the moisture has formed steam; then use more pressure. Do not allow the iron to stand in one spot for any length of time as the imprint of the iron will be visible.
7. Be sure to stop pressing before the fabric is dry. When the press cloth is lifted, there should be a small amount of steam rising from the garment.
8. Put the garment away carefully to dry, as it will be slightly moist and will wrinkle easily.

*To remove shine.*

Wool fabrics often become shiny after continued use. The reason for this is that the nap is worn off or flattened with wear. If the nap is merely flattened the shine can be removed, at least temporarily. Place the garment right side up on the ironing board. Cover with a woolen cloth and then with the dampened and dry cloths; steam by holding the iron close to the pressing cloth. Press lightly, then brush with a stiff-bristled brush. Steam and press again. The brushing and steaming may have to be repeated.

*To remove baggy spots.*

Place the baggy or bulged area flat on the ironing board. Cover with a single layer of muslin which has been wrung out of water. Steam by holding the iron close enough to the press cloth to form steam; then apply pressure very lightly. Lift the press cloth, make sure the fabric is flat and no wrinkles have been formed, and continue to steam and press until the fullness has disappeared.

### Care of Wool Garments

The life of a garment not only can be extended over a longer period of time, but it also will maintain a far better appearance if the proper care is given to it. Therefore, a few suggestions for the care of wool garments have been included here.

1. Hang woven wool garments carefully as soon as they are taken off, since moisture from the body causes them to wrinkle easily when first removed.
2. Keep garments clean. All stains should be removed promptly. Clothes should not be allowed to become badly soiled before cleaning.
3. Wool garments will wear longer and better if they are aired from time to time, and are not worn too steadily. Rest periods between wearings help the wool to regain its original form.
4. Knitted garments should be placed flat in a box or drawer rather than be allowed to hang.
5. When wool garments are wet, hang them away from direct heat, and where the air can circulate freely through them.
6. Avoid excessive pressing. Many of the wrinkles will hang out if given suitable opportunity.

### Storing of Wool

When wool is stored carefully there will be little or no deterioration in its quality. Garments may be kept at ordinary room temperatures.

1. Before storing be certain that the garments are thoroughly clean.
2. Garments may be stored in cardboard boxes, garment bags made of heavy paper, or they may be carefully wrapped.
3. Para-di-chlorobenzine crystals can be sprinkled freely through the garments.
4. Seal the package or container with gummed tape to prevent moth infestation. Care should be taken that corners of boxes and folds of packages are well sealed.